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UNCLAS DJIBOUTI 000631

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E, PRM/AFR, AND S/CRS
ADDIS ABABA FOR REFCOORD
NAIROBI FOR RDRAPCHO AND REFCOORD
GENEVA FOR KPERKINS
CJTF-HOA FOR POLAD

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [SMIG](#) [SO](#) [DJ](#)

SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI TAKES STEPS TO ADDRESS GROWING REFUGEE BURDEN

REF: A) DJIBOUTI 582
B) DJIBOUTI 508 (AND PREVIOUS)
C) DJIBOUTI 482 (AND PREVIOUS)
D) DJIBOUTI 223

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: WFP officials report observing an estimated 5,000-20,000 refugees and assumed asylum-seekers in urban areas of Djibouti--a significant burden on a country whose total population numbers approximately 600,000. To address the growing number of refugees crossing into Djibouti from the border with Somaliland, the GoDJ has allowed UNHCR to construct a reception site at Loyada. The GoDJ is also expected to promulgate a new presidential decree pertaining to the operations of the National Eligibility Office, which is mandated to review applications for refugee status and resettlement in Djibouti. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) A high-level mission from WFP Geneva (meeting July 12? 16 with donor representatives and GoDJ officials to discuss the GoDJ's decision to expel the WFP country director for Djibouti, REF A) reported observing an estimated 5,000-20,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in urban areas of Djibouti. The team visited areas and populations severely affected by the drought and soaring food prices. According to UNHCR, in many urban areas visited, the WFP mission observed urban refugees who do not receive assistance; registered asylum-seekers (non-Somalis) resident in Djibouti, but whose claims have not yet been determined for over five years; and persons who are waiting to be listed for individual status determination.

¶3. (U) Separately, the GoDJ approved plans allowing UNCHR to build a reception site near the Somalia border, to process newly arrived refugees. Construction began early July and is expected to be completed by mid-August. On July 19, Post's Refugee Officer visited the site with UNCHR Representative Ann Encontre. The site is located inside Djibouti, 0.5 km from the Djiboutian police checkpoint at Loyada, near Djibouti's border with Somaliland. Initially, UNHCR requested permission to build the site in the no-man's-land between the Somaliland and Djibouti borders. The Ministry of Interior agreed; however, the Ministry of Defense reportedly blocked the request, for unknown reasons.

¶4. (U) On July 21, the GoDJ reinstituted its National Eligibility Office, which had been inactive for five years. The office's mandate is to make refugee status determinations, therefore allowing non-Djiboutians to resettle in Djibouti. In 2000, the GoDJ signed a decree to create this body and a commission to oversee its work; however, standard operational procedures were not developed, and the office failed to function. According to UNHCR, Djibouti's president is expected to sign a new draft decree this week. UNHCR has drafted a standard operating procedure to present to the GoDJ after the

signing of the decree, to help ensure that the National Eligibility office functions properly.

¶5. (U) COMMENT. These steps by the Government of Djibouti highlight the growing burden (REF D) that refugees--primarily from Somalia--are placing on the smallest country in the Horn of Africa. Conducting a census to identify the total number of alien individuals in urban areas, determining their proper status, and taking subsequent action to resettle or integrate them remain challenges to be addressed by the GoDJ and its partners.

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